



## Income and Hardship Employment

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**H**elping families and individuals become self-sufficient through increased employment is a major goal of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, as well as many other federal and state income support programs. Many people receiving public support now face benefit reductions or termination if they are not working or preparing for work. Among those affected are adults in families receiving support from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program and childless adults receiving food stamps. Moreover, as public support for nonworking low-income Americans declines, the pressure on working low-income adults to remain employed increases.

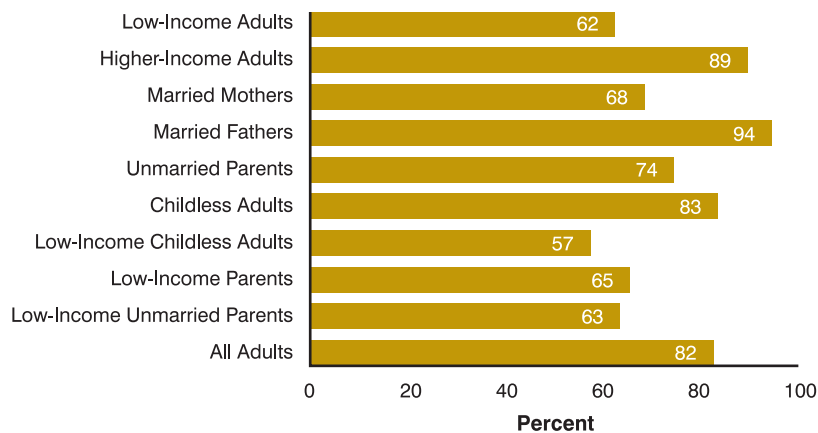
These changes prompt a number of questions about the role of work in low-income families. Do adults in these families work as much as the adult population at large? What share of low-income adults held jobs as federal welfare reform began? Did that share vary by state or by family type? To answer these questions, adults between the ages of 25 and 54 were asked about their current employment status when interviewed in 1997.

Nationally, 82 percent of adults worked in a full- or part-time job. In families with low incomes (below 200 percent of the federal poverty level), 62 percent of adults worked; 89 percent of adults in higher-income families worked, a statistically significant difference.

Employment rates varied by family situation and were particularly uneven among parents with children living at home. Married mothers were the least likely parents to work (68 percent did), whereas married fathers were the most likely (94 percent). Among unmarried parents, 74 percent worked. Although 83 percent of all childless adults had jobs, only 57 percent of low-income childless adults worked.

Low-income parents in general, and unmarried low-income parents in particular, worked considerably less than adults as a whole: 65 percent of all low-income parents and 63 percent of unmarried low-income parents had jobs.

### Full-Time or Part-Time Employment of Adults Age 25–54, by Income and Parental Status, 1997



Source: Urban Institute

**Assessing  
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This *Snapshot* presents findings from the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), a 1997 survey of 44,461 households with and without telephones that are representative of the nation as a whole and of 13 states. As in all surveys, the data are subject to sampling variability and other sources of error.

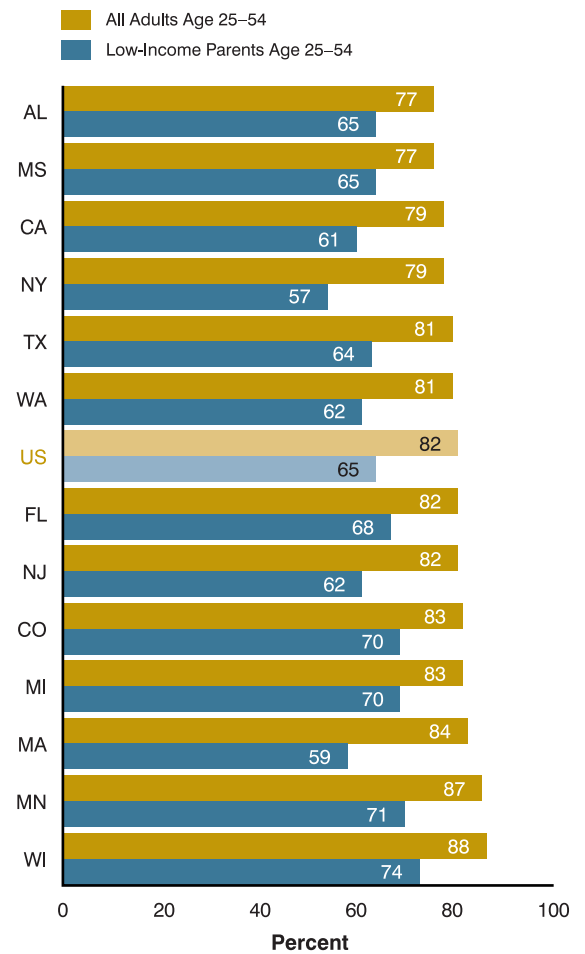
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In the 13 states surveyed, employment of all adults ranged from 77 percent in Alabama and Mississippi to 88 percent in Wisconsin. Employment exceeded the national average of 82 percent in Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Wisconsin and trailed the nation in Alabama, California, Mississippi, and New York.

Employment among low-income parents was lower than employment among all adults in every state studied, affirming the national trend across a variety of circumstances. In the majority of states, 60 percent to 70 percent of low-income parents held full-time or part-time jobs, about 15 percentage points lower than the rates for all adults in these states. Low-income parents fared particularly poorly in comparison with other adults in Massachusetts and New York, with less than 60 percent employed, but they matched the national average for low-income parents in Alabama and Mississippi, the states with the lowest employment overall.

Unmarried parents were the adults most likely to need public support, since they usually had low personal incomes and no second breadwinner or caregiver in the home and they were less likely to work than adults as a whole. In many of the states, as in the nation, around three-fourths of unmarried parents worked, but those rates were about 6 percentage points below the rate for adults in general. Only in Wisconsin did employment of unmarried parents (85 percent) nearly equal that of other adults (88 percent). Unmarried parents fared particularly poorly relative to other adults in Massachusetts and New York.

### Full-Time or Part-Time Employment of All Adults and Low-Income Parents, by State, 1997



Source: Urban Institute

### Adults (%) Age 25 to 54 Employed Full-Time or Part-Time, 1997

Parental Status	AL	CA	CO	FL	MA	MI	MN	MS	NJ	NY	TX	WA	WI	US
<b>Under 200% of poverty level</b>														
All parents	64.7	61.4	69.5	67.8	58.7	70.4	70.8	65.4	61.8	56.8	64.5	62.1	74.4	65.0
<b>Over 200% of poverty level</b>														
All parents	86.1	84.6	86.2	87.9	87.6	86.9	90.9	89.3	84.5	86.2	86.4	85.2	90.7	87.1
<b>All incomes</b>														
Unmarried parents	68.8	69.3	77.8	75.7	71.2	76.7	81.0	69.1	72.2	64.0	70.8	74.9	85.4	73.6
All parents	78.3	75.3	81.9	80.6	81.4	82.6	86.4	79.2	79.7	76.3	77.5	79.0	86.9	79.8
All adults	77.4	78.7	83.5	82.3	83.6	83.1	87.0	77.1	82.4	79.4	80.6	80.8	87.7	81.5

Figures in color represent statistically significant differences from the national average at the .05 confidence level. Figures in black are not statistically significantly different from the national average. All figures in text, charts, and table are rounded.

Source: Urban Institute